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Book and Job Printing

EXECUTED WITH neatness and dispatch.

THE STORY TELLER.

THE GIANT'S COFFIN:

OR,

THE FEUD OF HOLT AND HOUSTON.

A TALE OF REEDY RIVER.

BY W. G. SIMMS.

Chapter I.

In 1776, the beautiful district of Greenville, in South Carolina—which is said to have had its name in consequence of the verdant aspect which it bore in European eyes—received its first white settlers from Virginia and Pennsylvania. Among these early colonists were the families of Holt and Houston—represented by two fearless borderers, famous in their day as Indian hunters; men ready with the tomahawk and rifle, but not less distinguished, perhaps, for the great attachment which existed between them. Long intercourse in trying periods—the habits of referring to each other in moments of peril—constant adventures in company—not to speak of similar tastes and sympathies in numerous other respects, had created between them a degree of affection, which it would be difficult, perhaps, to find among persons of more mild and gentle habits. Each had his family—his wife and little ones—and, traversing the mountain paths which lie between Virginia and the Carolinas, they came in safety to the more southern of the last-named colonies. Charmed with the appearance of the country, they squatted down upon the banks of Reedy River, not very far from the spot now occupied by the pleasant town of Greenville. Family division for the present there was none. Congeniality of taste, the isolation of their abodes, the necessity of concentration against the neighboring Indian nation of Cherokees, kept them together; and, continuing the life of the hunter, rather than that of the farmer, John Holt and Arthur Houston pursued the track of bears, deer and turkey, as before, with a keenness of zest which, possibly, derived its impulse quite as much from attachment to one another, as from any great fondness for the pursuit itself.

Meanwhile, their families, taking fast hold upon the soil, began to flourish together after a fashion of their own. Flourish they did, for the boys thrived, and the girls grew apace. But tradition has preserved some qualifying circumstances in this history, by which it would seem that their prosperity was not without alloy. The sympathies between *Mrs. Houston* and *Houston* were not, it appears, quite so warm and active as those which distinguished the intercourse of their respective husbands. Civil enough to each other in the presence of the latter, they were not unfrequently at "dagger-dance" in their absence. The husbands were not altogether ignorant of this condition of things at home, but they had their remedy; and there is little doubt that, like some other sportsmen of our acquaintance, they became happy hunters only when there was no longer any hope that they could be come happy husbands. Not, as quarrels must commonly own their spirit and existence to the presence of spectators, we may assume that some portion of the violence of our two wives underwent diminution from the absence of those before whom it might hope to display itself with appropriate elegance; and the wrath of the dames, only exhibited before their respective children, was very apt to expire in clouds, and slight flashes, and an under-current of distant thunder. Unhappily, however, the evil had consequences of which the weak mothers little thought, and the feud was entailed to the children, who, instead of assimilating, with childish propensities, in childish sports, took up the cudgels of their parents, and under fewer of the restraints, arising from prudence, and the recognition of mutual necessities—by which the dames were kept from extreme issues, they played the alresard cudgels about their mutual heads, with a degree of earnestness that very frequently rendered necessary the interposition of their superiors.

The miserable evils of this family feud fell most heavily upon the natures of the two eldest boys, one a Holt, the other a Houston—spoiling their childish tempers, impressing their souls with fearful passions, and embittering their whole intercourse.

At this period young Houston has reached the age of fourteen, and Holt of twelve years of age. The former was a tall, slender, and very handsome youth; the latter was short, thickset, and of rather plain, unpromising appearance. But he was modest, gentle, and subdued in temper, and rather retiring and shy. The former, on the contrary, was bold, vain, and violent—the petted boy of his mother, insolent in his demands, and reckless in his resentments—a fellow of unbending will, and of unmeasured impulses. He had already gone forth as a hunter with his father; he had proved his strength and courage; and he longed for an opportunity to exercise his youthful muscle upon his young companion, with whom, hitherto—he himself could not say how or why—his collisions had fallen short of the extremities of personal violence. For such an en-

counter the soul of young Houston yearned: he knew that Holt was not wanting in strength—he had felt in their plays together; but he did not doubt that his own strength regularly put forth was greatly superior.

One day the boys had gone down together to the banks of Reedy River to bathe. They met a deformed boy of the neighborhood whose name was Acker. In addition to his deformity, the boy was an epileptic, and such was his nervous sensibility, that, merely to point a finger at him in mischief, was apt to produce in him the most painful sensations. Sometimes, indeed, the pranks of his playmates, carried too far, had thrown him into convulsions. This unhappy lad had but just recovered from a sickness produced by some such practices, and this fact was well known to the boys. Disregarding it, however, John Houston proceeded to amuse himself with the poor boy. Holt, however, interposed, and remonstrated with his companion, but without effect. Houston persisted, until, fairly tired of the sport, he left the diseased boy in a dreadful condition of mental excitement and bodily exhaustion. This done, he proceeded to bathe.

Meanwhile, with that sort of cunning and vivacity which often distinguishes the impaired intellect of persons subject to such infirmities, the epileptic boy watched his opportunity, and stole down, unobserved, to the river's edge, among the rocks where the boys had placed their clothes. There he remained in waiting, and when John Houston appeared to dress himself the epileptic threw himself violently upon him, bore him to the ground, and grasping a heavy rock would have beaten out the brains of the offending lad, but for the timely assistance of Arthur Holt, who drew off the assailant, deprived him of his weapon, and gave his comrade a chance to recover, and place himself in a situation to defend himself.

But Acker, the epileptic boy, was no longer in a condition to justify the hostility of any enemy. His fit of frenzy had been succeeded by one of weeping, and, prostrate upon the ground, he lay convulsed under violent nervous agitation. While he remained in this state, John Houston, who had now partially dressed himself, furious with rage at the indignity he had suffered, and the danger he had escaped, prepared to revenge himself upon him for this last offence; and, but for Arthur Holt, would, no doubt, have subjected the miserable victim to a severe beating. But the mainly nature of Acker resented and resisted this brutality. He stood between the victim and his persecutor.

"You shall not beat him John—it was your own fault. You begin it."

"I will beat you, then," was the reply.

"No! you shall not beat me, either."

"Ha! Take that!"

The blow followed on the instant. A first blow, and in the eye too, is very apt to conclude an ordinary battle. But this was to be no ordinary battle. Our young hero was stunned by the blow—the fire flashed from the injured eye—but the unfairness of the proceeding awakened a courage which had its best sources in the moral nature of the boy; and, though thus taken at advantage, he closed in with his assailant, and in this manner, lessened the odds at which he otherwise must have fought with one so much taller and longer in the arms than himself. In the fling that followed, John Houston was on his back—his conqueror suffered him to rise.

"Let us fight no more, John," he said, on relaxing his hold; "I don't want to fight with you."

The answer, on the part of the other, was a renewal of the assault. Again was he thrown, and this time with a considerable increase of severity. He rose with pain. He felt his hurts.

The place of battle was stony ground. Fragments of rocks were at hand. Indignant and mortified at the result of the second struggle—among only at vengeance—the furious boy snatched up one of these fragments, and once more rushed upon his companion. But this time he was restrained by a third party—no less than his own father—who, unobserved, had emerged from the neighboring thicket, and unseen by the combatants, had witnessed the whole proceeding.

The honorable nature of the old hunter recoiled at the conduct of his son. He suddenly took the lad by the collar, wrested the stone from him, and laying a heavy hickory rod some dozen times over his shoulders, with no moderate emphasis, sent him home, burning with shame, and breathing nothing but revenge.

Chapter II.

In the space of five years after this event, the two fathers yielded their scalps to the Cherokees, and upon the young men, now stretching to manhood, devolved the task of providing for their families. The patriarchal way was at an end, and with it, all those restraining influences by which the external show of peace had been kept up. It was to be a household in common no longer. But a short time had elapsed, when a domestic storm of peculiar violence determined the dames to separate forever; and, while the family of Holt, under the management of young Arthur, remained at the old settlement near Reedy River, the Houstons proceeded to Paris Mountain, some seven miles off—in the neighborhood of which may be found, at this day, some traces of their rude retreat. The settlement at Reedy River, meanwhile, had undergone increase. New families had arrived, and the first foundations were probably then laid of the flourishing village which now borders the same lovely stream. The sons grew up, but not after the fashion of their fathers. In one respect only did John Houston resemble his parent—he was a hunter. Arthur, on the other, had settled down into a mechanical, hard working farmer, who, clinging to his family fireside, made it cheerful, and diffused

the happiest influences around it. He grew up strong rather than handsome, good rather than conspicuous; and, under his persevering industry and steady habits, his mother's family, now his own, reached a condition of comfort before unknown. The family of young Houston, by which we mean his mother, sister, and a younger brother, did not flourish in a like degree. Yet Houston had already acquired great reputation as a hunter. In the woods he seemed literally to follow in his father's footsteps. He was certainly the handsomest youth in all the settlements; of a bold carriage, lofty port, free, open, expressive, countenance, tall of person and graceful of movement.

It was some qualification of these advantages that the *morale* of John Houston was already something more than questionable in the public opinion of the settlement. His tastes were vicious—his indulgence in strong drink had more than once subjected him to humiliating exposures, but as yet they had produced caution rather than dislike among his associates. Among the women, however, they were not suspected to exist, or, if known or suspected, weighed very little against the graces of a fine person, a dashing, easy carriage, and a free "gift of the gab," which left him quite as unrivalled among the debaters as he was among the dancers.

Among the families settled down upon Reedy River, was that of Marcus Heywood, a Virginia cavalier, a fine hearty gentleman of the old school, polished and precise, who had seen better days, and was disposed very much to insist upon them. He brought with him into the little colony a degree of taste and refinement, of which, before his coming, the happy little neighborhood knew nothing; but, unhappily for all parties, he survived too short a time after his arrival, to affect very favorably, or very materially, the sentiments and manners of those about him. He left his widow, a lady of fifty, and an only daughter of sixteen to lament his loss. Mrs. Heywood was a good woman, an excellent housewife, a kind matron, and all that is exemplary at her time of life; but Leda Heywood was a paragon—in such high terms is she described by still-worshipping tradition, and the story that comes down to us, seems, in some respects to justify the warmth of its eulogium. At the period of her father's death, Leda was only sixteen; but she was tall, well-grown, and thoughtful beyond her years. The trying times in which she lived—years of travel—the necessity of vigilance—the duties which naturally fall upon the young in new countries—conspired to bring out her character, and to hurry to maturity an intellect originally prompt and precocious. Necessity had forced thought into exercise, and she had become acute, observant, subdued in bearing, modest in reply, gentle, full of womanly solicitude, yet so calm in her deportment that, to the superficial observer, she wore an aspect—quite false to the fact—of great comeliness and insensibility. Her tastes were excellent; she sang very sweetly—and when you add to the account of her merits, that was really very lovely, a fair, blue-eyed, graceful creature—you need not wonder that one day she became a heroine! A heroine! poor Leda! Bitterly, indeed, must she have wept, in aftertimes, the evil fortune that doomed her to be a heroine.

But Leda was a belle before she became a heroine. This was, perhaps, the more unfortunate destiny of the two. She was the belle of Reedy River, called by hunter, and shepherd, and farmer, "the blue-eyed girl of Reedy River," to whom all paid an involuntary tribute, to whom all came as suitors, and, with the rest, who but our two acquaintances, John Houston and Holt. At first they themselves knew not that they were rivals, but the secret was one of that sort which very soon contrived to reveal itself. It was then that the ancient hate of John Houston revived, in all its fury.

If Arthur Holt was not conscious of the same feelings exactly, he was yet conscious of an increased dislike of his companion. With that forbearance which, whether the fruit of prudence or timidity, Arthur Holt had always been careful to maintain in his intercourse with his former associate, he now studiously kept aloof from him as much as possible. Not that this reserve and caution manifested itself in any unmanly weakness. On the contrary, no one could have appeared more composed, when they met than Arthur Holt. It is true that, in the actual presence of Leda Heywood, he was rather more embarrassed than his rival. The reader will not need to be reminded that we have already described him as being naturally very shy. This bashfulness showed badly in contrast with the deportment of John Houston. If the difference between the manner of the two young men, in approaching their mistress, was perceptible to herself and others, it was little likely to escape the eyes of one who, like John Houston, was rendered equally watchful by hate and jealousy. But, unconscious of any bashfulness himself, he could not conceive the influence of this weakness in another. He committed the grievous error of ascribing the disquiet and nervous timidity of Arthur Holt to very different origin;—and fondly fancied that it arose from a secret dread which the young man felt of his rival. We shall not say what degree of influence this notion might have had, in determining his own future conduct towards his rival.

Some months had passed away since the death of Colonel Heywood, in this manner, and the crowd of suitors had gradually given way to the two to whom our attention has been more particularly turned. Events, meanwhile, had been verging towards a very natural crisis; and the whisper, on all hands, determined that Leda Heywood was certainly engaged, and to John Houston. This whisper, as a matter of course, soon reached the ears of the man whom it was most likely to annoy.

Arthur Holt could not be said to hope, for, in truth, Leda Heywood had given him but little encouragement; still he was not willing to yield in despair, for, so far as he himself had observed, she had never given any encouragement to his rival. At all events, there was a way of settling the matter, which the stout-hearted fellow determined to take at the earliest moment. He resolved to propose to Leda, a measure which he would sooner have adopted, but from a delicate scruple arising from the fact that he had made himself particularly useful to her mother, who, in her widowhood, and straitened circumstances, was very glad to receive the help and friendly offices of the young farmer. These scruples yielded, however, to the strength of his feelings; and one evening he had already half finished his toilet with more than usual care, in order to the business of a formal declaration, when, to his own surprise and that of his family, John Houston abruptly entered the humble homestead. It was the first visit he had paid since the separation of the two families, and Arthur saw at a glance that it had its particular object. After a few moments, in which the usual civilities were exchanged, John Houston, rising as he spoke, said abruptly to Arthur—

"You seem about to go out, and perhaps we may be walking in the same direction. If so, I can say what I have to say, while we're on the road together."

"I am about to go to see the Widow Heywood."

"Very good! our road lies the same way." The tones of Houston were more than usually abrupt as he spoke, and there was a stern contracting of the brow, and a fierce flashing of the eye, while he looked upon the person he addressed, which did not escape the observation of Arthur, and excited the apprehensions of his mother. On some pretence, she drew her son into her chamber ere he went forth, and in a few, but earnest words, insisted that John Houston meant harm.

"If you will go with him, Arthur, take this pistol of your father's in your bosom, and keep a sharp look-out upon him. Man never meant evil if John Houston does not mean it now."

We pass over her farther remonstrances. They made little impression upon Arthur, but, to quiet her, he put the weapon into his bosom—half ashamed—as he did so—of a concession that seemed to look like cowardice.

The two young men set out together, and the eyes of the anxious mother followed them as long as they were in sight. They took the common path which led them down to the river, just below the falls. When they reached the opposite shore, and before they had ascended the rocks by which it is lined, John Houston, who had led, turned suddenly upon his companion, and thus addressed him—

"Arthur Holt, you may wonder at my coming to see you to-day, for I very well know that there is no love lost between us. You like me as little as I like you. Nay, for that matter, I don't care how soon you may hear it from my lips—I hate you, and shall always hate you! We were enemies while we were boys—we are enemies now that we are men; and I suppose that we shall be enemies as long as we live. Whether we are to fight upon it is for you to say."

Here he paused and looked eagerly into the eyes of his companion. The latter regarded him steadily, but returned no answer. He evidently seemed to await some farther explanation of the purpose of one who had opened his business with an avowal so startling and ungracious. After a brief pause, Houston proceeded:—

"The talk is that you're a-courting Leda Heywood—that you mean to offer yourself to her—and when I see how finely you have rigged yourself out for to-night, I'm half inclined to believe you're foolish enough to be thinking of it. Arthur Holt, this must not be! You must have nothing to do with Leda Heywood!"

He paused again—his eyes keenly searching those of his rival. The latter still met his glance with a quiet sort of determination, which betrayed nothing of the effect which the words of the other might have produced upon his mind. Houston was annoyed. Impatiently, again, he spoke as follows:—

"You hear me—you hear what I say?"

"Yes, I hear you, John Houston."

"Well!—"

"Well!—you want my answer, I suppose?"

"You shall have it! This it is. If you are a madman or a fool, that is no reason why I should not do as I please!"

The other was about to interrupt him—but Holt persisted:—

"Let me finish, John Houston. I heard you patiently—now, hear me! I am no fighting man, and as heaven is above us, I have no wish to quarrel; but I am ready to fight whenever I can't do better. As for being bullied by you that is out of the question. I am not afraid of you, and never was, as you should have known before this, and as you may know whenever the notion may suit you to try. I am now, this very moment, going to see Leda Heywood, and mean to ask her hand."

"That you shall never do!" exclaimed the other, whose passions had been with difficulty kept down so long—"That, by the eternal! you shall never do!"—and as he spoke, drawing a knife from his belt, he rushed upon Arthur Holt with a promptness and fury that left the latter in no doubt of the bloody and desperate purposes of his foe. But the coolness of the young farmer was his safeguard in part, and to the weapon, so thoughtfully furnished him by his mother, he was indebted for the rest. He Holt, but these scruples were soon compelled to give way to a sense of superior duty. It soon Houston's eye, and read in his eye the bloody

purpose of his soul, the moment ere he struck. Retreating on one side, he was ready, when the latter turned a second time upon him with his presented pistol.

"It is well for both of us, perhaps," said he, quietly, as he cocked and held up the weapon to the face of the approaching Houston, "that this pistol was put into my hands by one who knew you better than I did; or you might this moment have my blood upon your soul. Let us now part, John Houston. If you are bent to go from this to Widow Heywood's—the path is open to you—go! I will return home, and seek some other time, when there's no chance of our meeting; for I neither wish to kill you nor be killed by you. Which will you do—go forward or return? Take your choice—I yield the path to you."

The fury of the baffled assassin may be imagined. It is not easy to describe it. But he was in no condition of mind to visit Leda Heywood, and, after exhausting himself in ineffectual threatenings, he dashed once more across the foaming torrents of Reedy River, leaving Arthur Holt free to pursue his way to the cottage of his mistress. This he did with a composure which the whole exciting scene, thro' which he had passed, had entirely failed to disturb. Indeed, the events of this interview appeared to have the effect, only, of strengthening the resolve of the young farmer, for to confess a truth, the good fellow was somewhat encouraged—by certain expressions which had dropped from Houston in his fury—to hope for a favorable answer to his suit. We may as well say, in this place, that the frenzy of the latter had been provoked by similar stories reaching his ears to those which had troubled Arthur.

When they separated, and Arthur Holt went forward to the cottage of Widow Heywood, it was with a new and most delightful hope awakened in his bosom.

Chapter III.

But he was doomed to disappointment. He was rejected—tenderly, but firmly. Leda Heywood was not for him, and resigning himself to the denial, with the instincts of a man by nature strong, and inured by trial to disappointments, Arthur Holt retired from the field of Love, to cultivate more certain fruits in those of Ceres and Pomona. Had the mind of the young farmer been morbidly affected, his mortification would have been heightened by subsequent events. Three days afterwards, Leda Heywood accepted the hand of his enemy, John Houston! Philosophers will continue to seek in vain for the cause of that strange perversity, by which the tastes even of the finest women, are sometimes found to be governed. There is a mystery here beyond all solution. The tastes and sympathies of Leda Heywood and John Houston did not run together—there was, in reality, no common ground, whether of the affections or of the sentiments, upon which they could meet. But he sought, and wooed, and won her—they were married; and to all but Arthur Holt, the wonder was at an end after the customary limits of the ninth day. The wonder, in this case, will be lessened to the reader if two or three things were remembered. Leda Heywood was very young, and John Houston very handsome. Of the wild passions of the latter she knew little or nothing. She found him popular—the favorite of the damsels around her, and this fact, alone, will account for the rest. But we must not digress in speculations of this nature. The parties were married, and the honeymoon, in all countries and climates, is proverbially recolored. The only awkward thing is, that, in all countries, it is but a monthly moon.

The wedding took place. The honey-moon race, but set somewhat earlier than usual. With the attainment of his object, the passion of John Houston soon subsided, and we shall make a long story conveniently short by saying, in this place, that it was not many weeks before Leda Heywood (or, as we must now call her,) Leda Houston, began to weep over the ill-judged precipitation with which she had joined herself to a man whose violent temper made no allowances for the feelings, the sensibilities and tastes of other. No longer restrained by the dread of losing his object, his brutalities shocked her delicacy, while his fierce passions awoke her fears. She soon found herself neglected and abused, and learned to loathe the connexion she had formed, and to weep bitter tears in secret. To all this evil may be added the pressure of poverty, which now began to be more seriously felt than ever. The hunter life, always uncertain, was still more so in the case of one like John Houston, continually led into indulgences which unfitted him, sometimes for days together, to go into the woods. Carousing at the tavern with some congenial natures, he suffered himself to be little disturbed by home cares; and the privations to which his wife had been subjected even before her marriage, were now considerably increased. It will be remembered that the Widow Heywood was indebted (perhaps even more than she then knew) to the generous care of Arthur Holt. Her resources from this quarter were naturally withdrawn on the marriage of her daughter with Houston, not so much through any diminution of the young farmer's sympathy for the objects of his bounty, as from a desire to withdraw from any communion, direct or indirect, with the family of his bitterest foe. Knowing the fierce, unreasoning nature of Houston, he was unwilling to expose to his violence the innocent victims of his ill habits—a consequence which he very well knew would follow the discovery of any services secretly rendered them by his mother, he was indebted for the rest. He Holt, but these scruples were soon compelled to give way to a sense of superior duty. It soon Houston's eye, and read in his eye the bloody

was now the fifth night of his watch,—He to despair of his object. He had seen-
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s. His wife had appeared only as she was,
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He was furious that he could find no good
of fury, and weary, of a watch which was
rich at variance with his habits. He deter-
that night to end it. With the night and
usual hour, came the unfaithful Arthur.—
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of meal, a small vessel of butter and a neat
basket of apples. For a moment he lingered
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word—she was evidently breathing a spon-
well and

James Porter, chief clerk of the Indian at Washington, arrived in New Orleans last night, having returned from Natchitoches, which place he accompanies the delegations of the far West—leaving them all in good spirits.

Mormons. The last accounts from Nauvoo present the Mormons as in full preparation and every moment expecting an attack. The armed force was about 600, with 5 six-shooters well-prepared. The women in the city were enlisted for the war, and were armed for drill. Is there not energy and force in Illinois to put an end to this absurd and dangerous delusion?

ditor of the Philadelphia Spirit of the Times, just returned from Europe, says "It is a seat, and every unprejudiced mind acquainted with facts must admit it, that there is really none the amount of intellectual ability in the houses of Parliament, or in the French Chamber there is in our two Houses of Congress." "We never supposed there was 'anything like' them a

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presentations. Democrats, Paris, &c., Horatio
Norway &c., Noble. Dixfield, &c.,

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"A Northern man with Southern property."—A Ver-
mont hunter was pursued and caught last week near En-
dow, having with him two negroes, stolen from Vir-
ginia. [N. Y. Sun.

white goose on the day he was to exhibit it, has por-
ed an *auger* for boring square holes.

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men and counterfeit money from Michigan and
me.

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AARUS H. LUPKIN.
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